

Democrats Need a Hot Chocolate Party

Written by George E. Curry
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It is becoming increasingly clear that President Obama and Democrats need pressure from within the party to force them to stand their ground against the Tea Party insurrection in Congress. As was evident in the recent debt ceiling fiasco, conservative House Republicans have gravitated even farther to the right because of pressure from the Tea Party movement. Democrats are being towed along kicking and screaming. Well, screaming. That's why there is an urgent need to form a Hot Chocolate Party to force Democrats to start acting like Democrats.

Democrats control the White House and the Senate but they don't act like the party in control. And that's because they rarely control anything, including their own party members. The public agenda is being driven by the Tea Party, a small sect that has become so powerful that its members forced an embarrassed House Speaker John Boehner to withdraw his debt ceiling bill from the floor.

To his credit, Boehner was smart enough to regroup and give the Tea Party what it wanted. To their discredit, President Obama and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid agreed to give the Tea Party zealots nearly everything they asked for. In the end, that still wasn't enough to satisfy them.

How did Democrats lose their way?

President Obama, the titular head of the party, has usually adopted sensible public policy stances on such issues as the public option in health care and letting the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy expire. In the face of withering Republican opposition, however, Obama has usually capitulated.

For example, candidate Obama campaigned for universal health care. At the time, the U.S. was the only industrialized country in the world that did not provide universal health care. Many progressives wanted a single-payer plan similar to the one in Canada. With such a powerful health care lobby in Washington, there was little chance of achieving that goal. So they agreed to go along with the public option, a government health insurance agency that competes with private insurance companies.

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Thanks to a president eager to strike a deal with the Party of No, the public option was removed as an option before the legislation was passed and signed into law. This was the beginning of the end.

Last December, Republicans pretended to oppose extending long-term unemployment benefits, a major goal of Democrats. But the quid pro quo was that Republicans would go along with the extension if Obama would agree to a 2-year extension of all Bush tax cuts. That was another time I wanted President Obama to call the GOP bluff, but apparently fighting is not in his DNA.

With high unemployment in his native Ohio, Boehner could not afford to look into the eyes of jobless voters back home and tell them unemployment benefits should not be extended. But a deal was struck giving Obama the unemployment extension and allowing Boehner and his GOP comrades to protect the super rich.

If the Hot Chocolate Party were in place, it could have insisted that the Bush tax cuts expire, something that would have cut the federal deficit by half. It also could have curtailed the practice U.S. companies hiding most of their assets overseas to keep from paying corporate taxes and ending the public subsidizing vacation homes, private jets and boats for the upper class.

As bad as past deals were, this deficit showdown was perhaps the worst example of Democrats being impotent.

An angry Barack Obama acknowledged how bad the deal was after Boehner walked out of their deficit reduction talks and refused to return his telephone calls.

Listen again to why Obama was angry: “Essentially, what we had offered Speaker Boehner was over a trillion dollars in cuts to discretionary spending, both domestic and defense,” Obama said in a July 22 news conference. “We then offered an additional \$650 billion in cuts to entitlement programs – Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security.”

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Here's the part that proved that the president was willing to give up too much: "We were offering a deal that called for as much discretionary savings as the Gang of Six [a panel Democratic and Republican lawmakers]. We were calling for taxes that were less than what the Gang of Six had proposed."

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid was equally pathetic in trying to advance his deficit proposal. He said his bill did not require any new taxes, something he hoped would satisfy Republicans. It didn't.

Enough of these wimpy Democrats. When challenged by Republicans, they roll over early and often. Democrats roll over so easily that they should be renamed the Roth IRA Party.

To let Democrats tell it, they roll over because they want what's best for the country and avoiding default, for example, was achieved only because they were willing to give Tea Party fanatics what they wanted. Compromise is now a one-way street. It's time to take another road.

Let's put the Hot Chocolate Party in the driver's seat to say no to the Party of No. If they again threaten to drive the country in a ditch, to borrow a quote from President Obama, provide them with the directions. I suspect that once they realize Democrats won't keep giving in to their empty threats, we will find out that they are not as crazy as they appear.

By George E. Curry
NNPA Columnist

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. He can be reached through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com You can also follow him at [www.twitter.com/currygeorge](https://twitter.com/currygeorge) {comments on}

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